

“Who Are We?”

- The United States Lifesaving Association is our nation’s nonprofit, professional association of beach lifeguards and open water rescuers.
- Our mission is to prevent drowning and other injuries in the aquatic environment through public education and the promotion of high standards among aquatic rescuers.

“Why Are We Partnering With NOAA?”

- We’re partnering with NOAA because together we can greatly increase the reach of our drowning prevention message.
- The drowning prevention challenge is staggering:
 - Each year America’s surf lifeguards rescue over 60,000 people from drowning.
 - Of these, over 80% are rescues of people caught in rip currents.
 - In the absence of timely rescue, we believe that over 80% of the drowning fatalities at surf beaches are also caused by rip currents.
 - We estimate that well over 100 fatalities a year are caused by rip currents – the vast majority at unguarded beaches.

Look at this sign, highlighting fatalities over the past ten years. (point to sign). As you can see, the annual, national number of rip current fatalities exceeds the number of fatalities for lightning, or tornadoes, or hurricanes, or shark attacks.

“What Makes Rip Currents So Dangerous?”

- Unlike dramatic storms, rip currents exist every day at surf beaches throughout the US.
- Rip currents are a quiet killer, unknown to many until they are caught in one.
- Rip currents are invisible to the untrained eye and can happen without warning.
- Rip currents are particularly dangerous for weak and non-swimmers, but they can sweep even the strongest swimmer out to sea.

“How Can People Avoid Becoming a Victim?”

- Learn to swim
- If you’ll be in surf, learn to swim in surf. It’s not the same as a pool or lake.
- Never swim alone.
- Swim near a lifeguard.
- Look for posted signs and warning flags, which may indicate higher than usual hazards.
- Check with lifeguards before swimming.
- Obey all instructions provided by lifeguards
- Be cautious. Always assume rip currents are present even if you don’t see them.
- If in doubt, don’t go out!

“Why Swim Near a Lifeguard?”

- Lifeguards are trained to:
 - Recognize rip currents
 - Inform the public about rip currents
 - Rescue people caught in rip currents
- The chance of drowning at a beach protected by lifeguards affiliated with USLA is 1 in 18 million.

“How Can People Survive If Caught in a Rip Current?”

- Try to remain calm to conserve energy.
- Don’t fight the current ... Think of it like an aquatic treadmill you can’t turn off. You want to step to the side of it.
- Swim across the current in a direction following the shoreline.
- When out of the current, swim away from the current at an angle toward shore.
- If you can’t escape this way, try to float or calmly tread water. Rip current strength eventually subsides offshore. When it does, swim at an angle away from the current toward shore.
- If at any time you feel you will be unable to reach shore, draw attention to yourself: face the shore, wave your arms, and yell for help.

“How Can People Assist Others Who Are Caught?”

- If you see someone in trouble, get help from a lifeguard.
- If no lifeguard is available, have someone call 9-1-1.
- Throw the rip current victim something that floats – a lifejacket, a cooler, a ball
- Yell instructions on how to escape.
- Many have drowned trying to help others. Don’t become a victim while trying to help someone else!

“How Can People Get More Information?”

- Our website: www.usla.org, includes information on rip current safety, as well as general water safety tips.

I’d now like to introduce a working lifeguard – Peter Davis – to give the beach lifeguard’s view of rip current safety.

[After Davis Remarks]

Ladies and Gentlemen, I welcome Mrs. Sandee LaMotte.